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ABSTRACT

The on-going professional development is the heart of Reading Recovery's success, pumping support to developing professionals in the program at all levels through renewed learning, collaboration, problem solving, and exposure to new research. On-going professional development is critical: (1) administrators need to protect their investment in the program through on-going professional development to support teacher leaders and they implement the innovation; (2) due to the complexity of the teacher leader role, multifaceted, on-going learning is required after the training year; (3) the teacher leaders' learning over time impacts the learning of Reading Recovery teachers, which in turn will lead to improvement in student achievement; (4) there is a moral imperative that teacher leaders be current in their understandings to provide the best instruction to teachers as well as children; and (5) teacher leaders must continue to develop their skills in collaboration with others on the district to ensure that Reading Recovery is seen as part of a larger, systemic plan for change in which all children learn to read and write. Contains 14 references, 8 suggestions for further reading, 3 notes, and 2 tables. (RS)

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Professional Development for Teacher Leaders: Promoting Program Ownership and Increased Success.

by M. Trika Smith-Burke

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READING RECOVERY COUNCIL OF NORTH AMERICA

Network News

Winter 1996

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Professional Development for Teacher Leaders: Promoting Program Ownership and Increased Success

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When most people hear the phrase "Reading Recovery" they think of the one-to-one, literacy instruction designed for the lowest achieving first graders. Rarely do they think of the initial training and on-going professional development model that is critical to the success of the program. Without this extensive model there would be little consistency in the training of teachers, teacher leaders, and trainers of teacher leaders, and in instructional routines and procedures for teaching children; nor would there be consistent implementation of the program in participating districts. In essence, there would be little quality control. When visiting RR teachers across North America, one would see similarity as teachers successfully construct individual programs for children by matching procedures to children, using the lesson framework as a guide. However, the proof is in the pudding. Annual student evaluation data from the Reading Recovery Council of North America show remarkably similar results in sites across the country over the past ten years. Approximately 80% to 85% of the children receiving a full program successfully discontinue from this supplemental intervention.

The professional development model consists of the initial training and on-going structured learning opportunities for all three levels of personnel in RR: the teacher, the teacher leader, and the trainer of teacher leaders. Unlike many other programs, all RR professionals learn to observe and teach lowest achieving first graders. As professionals who have the successful teaching of these children as a shared goal, all involved are responsible for continuing to improve their teaching on an on-going basis, helping to ground theory in practice and practice in theory, thus maintaining the effectiveness of the program. The on-going professional development is the heart of Reading Recovery's success, pumping support to developing professionals in the program at all levels through renewed learning, collaboration, problem solving, and exposure to new research.

Yet in these times of shrinking resources, administrators often think that professional development can be easily eliminated as a so-called "extra" and flirt with the idea of sacrificing it. The question they pose is "Why should a site support professional development for RR teachers and teacher leaders?" Since RR professionals are decision-makers who need to reflect upon and refine their craft to insure the quality of their teaching, without on-going professional development and interaction with RR and other knowledgeable professionals, the effectiveness of the program is likely to be compromised.

As I discuss the need for continued education for RR professionals in this article, I will limit my focus to the role of the teacher leader, the primary implementer of the program at the district or system level who in turn is responsible for teaching the RR teachers both initially and on an on-going basis. I

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wish to provide a strong argument for why on-going professional development is so particularly critical for the continued success of the program. Essentially there are five parts to the argument and they are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1

Five Reasons to Support on-Going Professional Development of Teacher Leaders in Reading Recovery

1) Research shows it takes at least three to five years to get a new program up and running efficiently and effectively (Samuels, 1981; Samuels and Pearson, 1988). Administrators need to protect their investment in the program through on-going professional development in order to support the teacher leaders as they implement an innovation and meet the expected resistance and challenges described by Fullan (1993).
2) Due to the complexity of the teacher leader role, multifaceted, on-going learning is required after the training year.
3) The teacher leaders' learning over time impacts the learning of RR teachers, which in turn will lead to improvement in student achievement and an increase in the numbers of children moving through the program.
4) There is a moral imperative that teacher leaders, like doctors, be current in their understandings in order to provide the best instruction to teachers as well as children.
5) Teacher leaders must continue to develop their skills in collaborating with others in the district to insure that RR is seen as part of a larger, systemic plan for change in which all children learn to read and write.

Districts Must Protect Their Investment

When district administrators decide to implement the RR program, there are often several surprises. It is not a "package deal" of teacher-proof materials. Instead a shift in mindset must occur. Designed for the lowest children having the most difficulty learning to read and write, this program maintains high expectations for these children to emerge successfully from the program as independent learners. The focus is on short term, early intervention -- not remedial, long-term service which has not been highly successful in this country in the past (Allington & Walmsley, 1995a). The targeted children are the most difficult to teach, having not been able to benefit from classroom instruction.

Reading Recovery, which is quite specific in scope, should be one part of a district's strategic plan for systemic change which works to improve instruction and services to meet all children's needs.[1] With full implementation[2] of RR in a district or system, the primary goal is to reduce the number of these lowest achieving children in need of special services (e.g. remediation, special education or an extra year through retention or transitional classes). This goal is accomplished through the initial and on-going professional development of the teacher leader who provides the same for RR teachers. The on-going professional development is all the more important due to the specialized nature of the population being served. These are children who have quite idiosyncratic routes to literacy and are most dependent on appropriate instruction, if the teacher is highly skilled and able to provide it (Clay, 1991).

Reading Recovery, which is quite specific in scope, should be one part of a district's strategic plan for systemic change which works to improve instruction and services to meet all children's needs.

Teacher leaders need opportunities for continued inquiry and learning to broaden and deepen their understandings from the training year by interacting with other teacher leaders and with trainers who can draw from the latest research and their experiences at multiple sites. The research shows that most programs take three to five years to get up and running efficiently and effectively (Samuels, 1981; Samuels & Pearson, 1988) Clearly, the district's investment in the initial training of a teacher leader is threatened if teacher leaders do not participate in on-going professional development.

The Teacher Leader Role Is Complex and Continually Evolving

Clay agrees with Goodlad (cited in Clay, 1987) that more than just well trained teachers are needed to implement and support an innovation such as Reading Recovery. There is the need for a redirecting system which is insistent, persistent, and can weather the storms of initiating, implementing, and institutionalizing an innovation. She quotes:

> *The systems of which the school is a part exercise enormous constraints which are essentially conservative and which serve to discourage change and innovation. These systems are not only the formal political ones of state and local organization for education, they are also the informal ones, exerting subtle pressure by way of implicit and explicit expectations of schooling... if change is to occur at anything like a more rapid rate than is characteristic of the whole, the existence or creation of a redirecting system of considerable salience may be critical. (p.42).*

Clay proposes that teacher leaders function as the redirecting system for RR.

The role of teacher leader is a complex one. They teach children, train RR teachers, and serve as the chief implementers of the program in a system (i.e. district or group of districts). They must be highly conversant in the areas of child learning and development of diverse populations in order to problem solve effectively in teaching children who present unique challenges. They must be able to support and facilitate teachers' growth and development, helping them shift and grow in their understanding of literacy learning over time. In addition, they must be able to analyze, interpret, and report

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data on student progress in order to monitor and communicate the effectiveness of the teaching. Based on the information gathered, they must adapt on-going continuing education of the trained teachers to meet their specific needs.

Organizationally, to be effective, teacher leaders must be knowledgeable about how to advocate for the program, and how to secure resources—from school, to district, state, and national levels. Understanding of time management and organizational strategies is also necessary. Beyond their training year, they must continue to explore research in many different areas: early literacy learning; teacher education and staff development; school and system change; research-based instructional practices in early reading and writing, and much more.

Communicators with a flair, teacher leaders must explain what RR is (and is not) to parents, prospective teachers, classroom teachers, specialists, principals, district level administrators, and Boards of Education. ...

Communicators with a flair, teacher leaders must explain what RR is (and is not) to parents, prospective teachers, classroom teachers, specialists, principals, district level administrators, and Boards of Education. They must participate in the regional network of RR teachers and teacher leaders and in national organizations like the Reading Recovery Council of North America. It is no wonder that the role of the teacher leader has been labeled "labor intensive!" Clay (1987) summarizes the teacher leader's role as exemplifying a redirecting system in the following manner:

...they teach children, train teachers, educate the local educators, negotiate the implementation of the programme, act as advocates for whatever cannot be compromised in the interests of effective results, and talk to the public and media correcting misconceptions. (p.47)

Without this redirecting system, the existing, traditional system may prevail by eventually transforming the new innovation, in this case RR, back to old practices.

Initial training. What set of initial experiences must be provided to launch teacher leaders in this demanding role? In the first of three, year-long, graduate courses, teacher leaders develop an understanding of how to translate Clay's theory of how young children learn to read and write continuous text into a menu of teaching procedures from which they as teachers learn to select the most appropriate to accelerate children's learning. They must also adopt the role of staff developer who assists colleagues in learning the same. In the second course they learn to analyze and interpret related theory and research, becoming thoughtful, critical consumers of the field of inquiry which relates to the program. The third course concentrates on leadership and the initiation of change in an educational system or district—the implementation of the program.[1]

...teacher leaders must understand how all levels of school structures operate, and be knowledgeable about how to advocate for the program, and how to secure resources...

Teacher leaders must begin to learn about the structure, decision-making, and policies of their district or consortium of districts and each school within the system. Conducting the weekly teacher training class is a major focus of this course. In addition to attending the weekly class at the university training site, they also function as apprentices at a RR training site, first through observation and then participation in teacher training courses under the guidance of trained teacher leaders.

During the training year, the teacher leaders learn about the instructional procedures for children and teachers, as well as about their role as a change agent in an educational system. Topics such as analyzing data in order to write annual site reports, continuing education sessions for trained teachers, and in-depth problem solving with children and/or teachers who present a challenge become truly relevant only after teacher leaders have engaged in teaching a class of their own. In essence, what the teacher leaders need to develop in that first year is a "self-extending system" or a knowledge base and a network of instructional, administrative, political, and interpersonal strategies which they can use to increase their understanding. It is a process of learning to identify, prioritize, and proactively solve problems or challenges through reflection, redesign, and innovative attempts. Teacher leaders take a step toward becoming lifelong learners during this initial year and collaboration with colleagues is established as an integral part of their repertoire of effective leadership skills.

On-going professional development. How does RR provide for this on-going professional learning? Sharing expertise and experiences is the focus of the four to six professional development days provided by regional university trainers to further learning by addressing problems encountered in the field. Primary emphasis is always on refining the teaching of children through a deepening of their understanding of Clay's work and other related research. Sessions on teacher training might consist of topics such as how to prompt teachers to teach for strategies, the nature of Continuing Contact sessions, or fostering an understanding of the theory of perceptual development and how it impacts instruction. Topics related to program implementation might involve sessions on engaging in the change process, responding to state educational policy, building early literacy teams in schools, or planning for full implementation and how this relates to district and school funding. In addition to the professional develop-

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ment sessions, teacher leaders annually attend a three-day national training institute which addresses common topics elicited from across the country. It is through these varied experiences that teacher leaders continue to take on new learning.

Approximately 70 California teacher leaders responded to an informal questionnaire administered by RR trainer Patricia Kelly. The questionnaire sought to determine the teacher leaders' views on the importance of professional development to effectiveness in their role. The teacher leaders worked in groups to promote discussion and to provide more extensive information.

... felt strongly that if not given the opportunity to be engaged in on-going professional development they would become "stale" or "routine"...

Two major themes emerged from their responses. The first revolved around staying " current" in terms of research and practice in the field of early literacy learning and instruction and in terms of state and national educational policy. They wished to improve and refine their teaching of children and teachers, utilizing this new information. In addition, they wanted to revisit and deepen their understanding of Clay's theory to make their teaching more effective. They felt strongly that if not given the opportunity to be engaged in on-going professional development they would become "stale" or "routine" in their teaching and perhaps "drift" away from effective RR teaching practices for children. Several made an analogy between RR as a vital program which changes with developments in the field to their view of themselves as lifelong learners. To quote one group of teacher leaders:

We're afraid the more time we spend in this position, we will be overwhelmed by the tasks and lose the theoretical power of our practice. We will revert to old habits if we do not continually reflect and challenge our practice.

The second major theme related to their perceived significance of collaboration, networking, experience sharing, problem solving, and mutual support. Several mentioned how important professional development meetings were in reducing the sense of isolation they feel at their own training sites. It was clear the expertise of other teacher leaders is highly valued, as is that of the trainers.

Professional Development of Teacher Leaders Impacts Teacher Success and Student Achievement

In the *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, Stephen Covey (1989) makes an argument about the effectiveness of teaching someone else in order to insure one's own learning. He suggests that until a person teaches someone else a concept, it is not certain whether he or she really understands it. For in so doing, the person teaching is forced to articulate, revise, and re-articulate the concept. The research on tutoring (e.g., Juel, 1991) demonstrates that the tutors often learn as much their tutees. In addition, Clay in her design of the RR program, insisted that all three levels of RR personnel teach children. She realized early on the effectiveness of having teachers,

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teacher leaders and trainers share the difficult task of teaching the children who are having the most difficulty learning to read and write. There is no quicker way to keep everyone honest about the effectiveness of their teaching. There is a strong argument that the on-going teaching of children is another form of professional development for all levels. For with each child, one is forced to address particular needs and create what Clay (1993) described as "a superbly sequenced program" (p. 9) for that child. No two children are the same. The behind the glass sessions at all levels provide a vehicle for challenging and sharing understanding of the procedures and how they relate to accelerating children's progress.

Who would go to a surgeon who was not current in his or her knowledge? Yet the public complains when there is cost in up-dating the knowledge of teachers, but not surgeons.

Teacher leaders also annually attend one regional institute or conference, during which many of them design and conduct training sessions for teachers in-training and/or trained teachers, another facet of on-going professional development. Articulating and working with teachers at these conferences is just one more way for teacher leaders to share and internalize new insights for themselves (Covey, 1989). In addition through four to six Continuing Contact sessions, teacher leaders work with teachers to refine their instructional skills, utilizing the insights from their professional development experiences to help teachers increase their effectiveness in moving children through the program successfully. Without this support, RR teachers have a tendency to drift away from the procedures and are influenced by the antithetical values and attitudes of existing school cultures (e.g. keeping children in the program too long, prematurely withdrawing a child from the program, or having low expectations). Just as trainers and teacher leaders need on-going professional development, so do RR teachers. As Sarason (1982) points out, to foster children's successful learning and inquiry, there must be a context in schools which fosters the same behaviors in teachers.

Without this support, RR teachers have a tendency to drift away from the procedures and are influenced by the antithetical values and attitudes of existing school cultures...

Teachers, Like Doctors, Must Remain Current in their Knowledge Base and Critical Understandings

Another facet of the argument for on-going professional development for teacher leaders is the concept of making sure they have in-depth knowledge and are current in their understandings. For RR children who are hard to teach, teacher leaders must know the most current research and practice which can be used effectively to match particular teaching procedures to children with particular needs. Then they can help RR teachers learn when it is appropriate and how to utilize these procedures as well. Who would go to a surgeon who was not current in his or her knowledge? Yet the public complains when there is cost in up-dating the knowledge of teachers, but not surgeons. If all children are to be educated effectively and efficiently, there is a moral imperative that teacher leaders be current in their understanding. Clearly teacher leaders will have the most impact if they have the opportunity to benefit from professional development experiences.

Teacher Leaders Serve as Part of the District Team to Insure that All Children Learn to Read and Write

Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves (1996) indicate that when an innovation is too narrowly focused it may encounter barriers to implementation. They argue that a more comprehensive paradigm that includes the "total teacher" and "total school" will help overcome some of these barriers. This paradigm deals with teachers' purposes, teachers as people, the actual working situations of teachers and the culture in and out of the school. If RR needs to be understood as exactly what it is -- a second chance program for the lowest achieving first graders supplied by a highly skilled teacher -- it must be considered as one component of a more comprehensive systemic plan.

Because teacher leaders keep current on the latest information and techniques in staff development, early literacy instruction, and school change and reform through on-going professional development, they can function as a resource to the system, sharing their knowledge. However, they must continue to teach children, work with teachers, attend professional development sessions, and ensure that RR teachers are successfully discontinuing 6 to 8 children or more, by refusing to take on other, new initiatives. When they do not place Reading Recovery as their number one priority, teacher leaders potentially jeopardize the effectiveness of the program, particularly if they fail to fulfill all of the functions assigned to the role (e.g. teach children). Because the intense need for improved classroom instruction is so great in this country, there is considerable pressure on teacher leaders to take on other responsibilities. Instead, teacher leaders can advise and work collaboratively with other district staff to help design in-service programs for classroom teachers to be carried

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out by other staff members. Clay (1993b) stresses that it is only with both good classroom teaching and effective full implementation of RR for the lowest children that the needs of most children will be met.

Conclusion

In an article by Linda Darling-Hammond and Milbrey W. McLaughlin (1995), the authors list six characteristics of the new paradigm of effective professional development required to prepare teachers for the future (see Table 2). As designed, RR receives high marks for its professional development model.

Table 2
Characteristics of the New Paradigm for Professional Development of Teachers

Staff development must:

- ... engage teachers in concrete tasks of teaching, assessment, observation, and reflection that illuminate the processes of learning and development.
- ... be grounded in inquiry, reflection, and experimentation that are participant-driven.
- ...be collaborative, involving a sharing of knowledge among educators and a focus on teachers' communities of practice rather than on individual teachers.
- ... be connected to and derived from teachers' work with their own students.
- ... be sustained, on-going, intensive, and supported by modeling, coaching, and the collective solving of specific problems of practice.
- ... be connected to other aspects of school change. (p.598)

As part of responsibility for children's learning, Sarason, in his book *The Predictable Failure of Educational Reform* (1990), highlights the importance of teacher ownership of an innovation which they must implement, as does Hargreaves in *Changing Times, Changing Teachers* (1994). To develop a new program, teachers must have input into the design of the program as well as a voice in how it is to be implemented and revised. What better way to build ownership than by treating teacher leaders as professionals who continue to learn through on-going professional development as the field changes.

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Footnotes

[1] Other initiatives might be to improve classroom instruction or develop a program for parents.

[2] The definition of full implementation is that the system has trained enough Reading Recovery teachers to serve all of the children defined as needing the intervention in the first grade. This is generally 20 - 30%, however the percentage may be lower. Note that if there is a significant number (e.g., more than 30%) in need of service, then this is not a problem that can be solved by Reading Recovery (designed only for one on one instruction) but instead a system level problem, namely the need to change and improve classroom teaching. In this case new procedures need to be developed that will meet the needs of a wide range of children, primarily taught in a group situation.

[3] This situation is further complicated if a teacher leader serves a group of districts, since this means that he or she must understand several (systems) or districts in order to facilitate the implementation of the program in a meaningful way.

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